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definition of
professional
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Superintendent's leadership needed to turn battleship of district's vision

The National Staff Development Council intends for its new definition of professional learning to apply to all schools. This definition is not just for use by schools that have highly professional faculties or those that have begun to develop learning teams. The definition is also for low-capacity schools that struggle to make adequate yearly progress and schools where teachers' self-efficacy is wanting. These schools have the *most* to gain from effectively implementing professional learning based on NSDC's definition.

Whether all schools experience this new approach to professional learning as value-added depends on superintendents. Only superintendents can provide the day-to-day vision and oversight necessary to turn around their districts' battleship of traditional staff development. Only superintendents have the authority to organize and deploy school systems' resources so the new approach to professional learning becomes an operational reality at the school level in all schools.

While superintendents' leadership is vital, they will not embrace the new definition simply because it is an idea whose time has come. Throughout their careers, superintendents have seen good ideas come and go; they have even adopted and abandoned some themselves. Consequently, they often filter new proposals through the lenses of "Will it work?" and "Will the benefits be worth the costs (financial, political, or emotional)?" Ironically, the answers to these questions frequently depend on the superintendents' own commitment, skill, and vigilance.

In considering the potential for applying the new definition, superintendents should begin by determining their school systems' total annual investment in all types of professional development and assessing the results. If there is not a direct causal or correlational link between what the school system spends and demon-

strable improvements in educators' and students' performance levels, reform is necessary. The NSDC definition points the way to "improving principals' and teachers' effectiveness in raising student achievement."

Some superintendents will worry that they will forfeit control because the definition calls for professional learning "at the school level." They should reflect honestly on their past large-scale, one-size-fits-all staff development initiatives and examine evidence of the cost-benefits. They may conclude that by taking all the responsibility for professional development, they have enabled principals and teachers to avoid responsibility for their own learning. If a school system decides what educators should learn, why should the educators seek learning they know is more responsive to their students' academic needs? The NSDC definition, on the other hand, calls for professional learning that "fosters collective responsibility for improved student performance."

For superintendents who decide to use NSDC's definition to seek better results from professional learning, everything depends on follow-through. Superintendents will need to designate persons to encourage and assist principals in learning how to organize, schedule, facilitate, and support school-level learning teams. Superintendents will want to develop a rational timeline for phasing out traditional staff development experiences and reallocating those resources to school-based learning. Most importantly, superintendents will want to keep a close eye on how and with what effect school-based learning teams function.

If superintendents lead by communicating high expectations for improved educator and student learning, and if they demonstrate patience and dogged attention to the nuts-and-bolts of implementation, all schools will benefit.